

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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EARLY HUNTING SEASONS FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS SET

Final regulations setting the hunting frameworks for certain migratory birds were published in the Federal Register on July 22. They became effective on that date.

This was the fifth rulemaking notice dealing with the 1977-78 migratory bird hunting season issued by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It sets forth the species to be hunted, the daily bag and possession limits, the season lengths, the earliest opening and latest closing season dates, and special closures, from which State conservation agency officials may select open season dates.

Shooting hours were not set in this rulemaking. The Service recently issued a draft environmental assessment on the impact of pre-dawn shooting hours with public comments accepted until July 25. The Service's decision on shooting hours will be announced following consideration of the comments.

Upon receipt of season selections from State officials, the Service, in mid-August, will publish in the Federal Register a final rulemaking amending certain sections of the Federal regulations to reflect seasons and limits for the contiguous United States, Alaska, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Hawaii for the 1977-78 season.

The regulations also reflect measures to protect endangered species of birds.

Species to be hunted are mourning doves, white-winged doves, band-tailed pigeons, rails, woodcock, snipe, and gallinules; teal in portions of the Mississippi and Central Flyways during September; sea ducks in certain defined areas of the Atlantic Flyway; sandhill cranes in designated portions of North and South Dakota; waterfowl, coots, snipe, and cranes in Alaska; certain migratory game birds in Puerto Rico; doves and pigeons in the Virgin Islands; and mourning doves in Hawaii.

Seasons for mourning doves may be selected between September 1, 1977, and January 15, 1978.

White-winged dove seasons may be selected in Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas between September 1 and December 31, 1978.

Band-tailed pigeon seasons of not more than 30 consecutive days may be selected in California, Oregon, and Washington between September 1, 1977, and January 15, 1978. Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah may select seasons not to exceed 30 consecutive days between September 1 and November 30, 1977.

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Seasons totaling no more than 70 days may be selected for clapper and king rails between September 1, 1977, and January 20, 1978, in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, and in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. The season will remain closed on clapper and king rails in all other States.

Seasons totaling no more than 70 days may be selected for sora and Virginia rails between September 1, 1977, and January 20, 1978, in States of the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways.

Woodcock seasons may be selected in States in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways between September 1, 1977, and February 28, 1978, for not more than 65 days. In the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey the season must end by January 31, 1978. A provision allows for an experimental zoning study in New Jersey.

Seasons of not more than 107 days for common (Wilson's) snipe may be selected in States in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways between September 1, 1977, and February 28, 1978. In the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia the season must end no later than January 31, 1978. Seasons not to exceed 93 days may be selected in the Pacific Flyway portions of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico between September 1, 1977, and February 28, 1978.

Gallinule seasons may be selected in States in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways between September 1, 1977, and January 20, 1978, for not more than 70 days.

Scoter, eider, and oldsquaw duck seasons may be selected in coastal areas of the Atlantic Flyway from Maine to Georgia for a maximum open season of 107 days between September 18, 1977, and January 20, 1978.

A September teal season may be held for no more than 9 days between September 1 and September 30, 1977, on all species of teal by the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas in areas delineated by State regulations.

A 5-day lesser sandhill crane season in designated portions of North and South Dakota may be held between September 1 and September 11, 1977.

Migratory game bird seasons in Alaska may be selected between September 1, 1977, and January 26, 1978, for waterfowl, coots, snipe, and cranes.

As in the past, hunting regulations this year are designed to remove or alleviate chances of conflict between seasons for migratory game birds and the protection of endangered species. These include closures of designated areas or special regulations to prohibit outright the taking of the Aleutian Canada goose, Puerto Rican plain pigeon, Puerto Rican parrot, the California, light-footed, and Yuma clapper rails, whooping crane, Mexican duck, peregrine falcon, Everglade kite, and bald eagle.